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BULLETIN OF THE CITY ART MUSEUM OF ST. LOUIS

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FRENCH CABINET

XVI CENTURY

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

FURNITURE

ITALIAN RENAISSANCE CASSONI

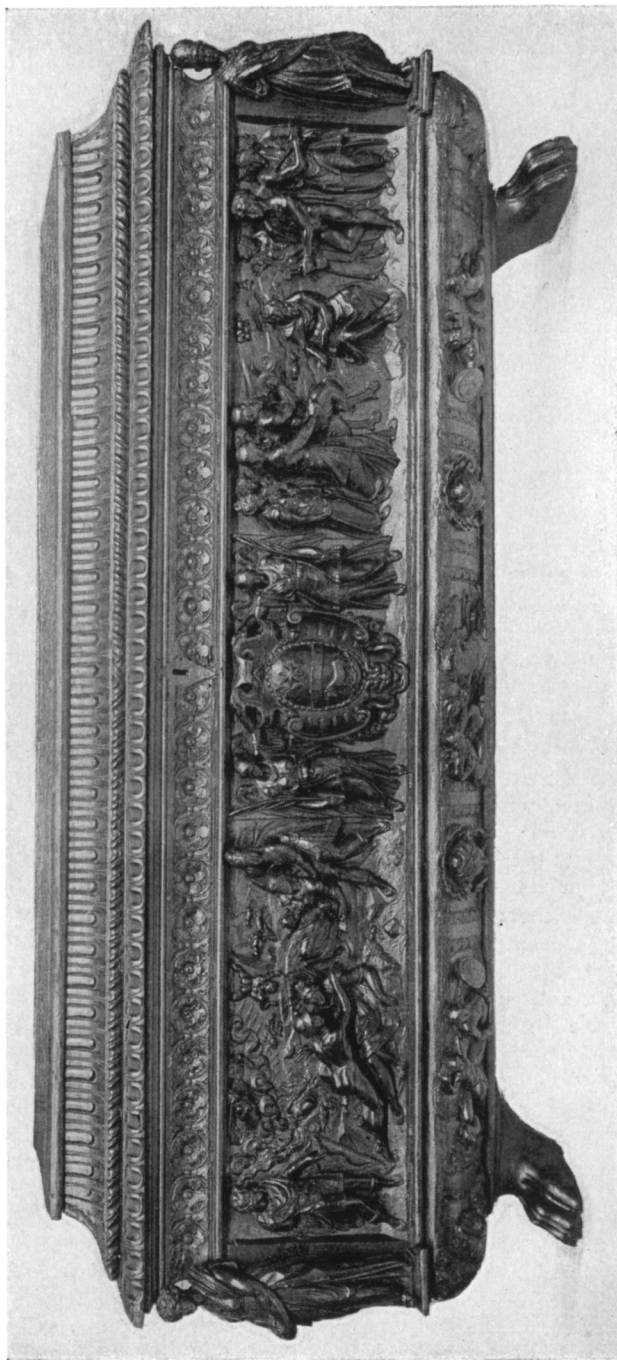
ONE of the most important objects in the Museum's collection of furniture is an Italian cassone, or marriage chest, of the period of the late Renaissance, which was acquired last April. The cassone is carved from walnut in the form of a rectangular, sculptured sarcophagus, a style which toward the end of the fifteenth century began to supersede the earlier rectangular cassoni with pastiglia and painted decoration. Its probable provenance is Rome.¹ In both form and decoration it reflects the deep influence exercised upon the contemporary art of the century by the recently unearthed examples of antique sculpture.

The lid is formed of a raised panel above a tongue and channel moulding with a lower gadrooned edging. The principal decorations are upon the body of the cassone. The central part is occupied by a coat of arms, flanked by sibyls holding palms, with figures on each side representing events in classic mythology, all carved in high relief against a background of gold. The end panels, each depicting a single episode, are similarly treated. At the front corners are larger figures, that on the left representing Peace, and on the right, War. At the back corners are female terminals. The base member is also carved in high relief with human and animal forms, the groups being separated by female masks in pecten shells. The

whole is supported by four lion feet, which are an unvarying characteristic of this type of cassone, as is also the moulding carved with various classic motifs. Age has added a dark, rich patina to the surface of the walnut and has toned the gilding until it gleams with the quiet luster of old gold. This richness of finish, in combination with the high relief of the various details, imparts a fine statuesque quality to the principal panels.

The carved figures, which are the most prominent feature of the ornamentation, represent events in the mythological story of Apollo. The narrative begins, somewhat obscurely, on the left panel at the front. The first group, beginning at the center, probably symbolizes the wanderings of Latona with her infant twins, Apollo and Diana, sustained by Jupiter. Next in order is Mercury rescuing an unidentified female figure. The connection of this group with the principal story is not clear. At the extreme left stands Apollo, the sun god. The small figures in the background probably present some version of the killing of Orion by Diana, an act to which she was incited by Apollo. The right hand panel shows the musical contest between Pan and Apollo, who are depicted on the left and right, respectively, with groups of followers, while Tmolus sits in judgment between them. The smaller end panels present, on the left, Apollo slaying the Python, and, on the right, Daphne pursued by Apollo, with Cupid appearing in the sky. The figures on the base represent sea gods and goddesses. They are used

(1) Odom, *Hist. of Italian Furniture*, p. 126.



ITALIAN CASSONE

XVI CENTURY

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ITALIAN CASSONE (VENETIAN)

XVI CENTURY

decoratively and have no connection with the narrative above.

A sixteenth century Italian cassone in the Industrial Museum at Berlin, on which is depicted Apollo and Diana slaying the children of Niobe, is so similar in both subject matter and structure to the one under discussion that at the first glance it would seem to be a companion piece. There are certain features, however, which indicate that the Berlin specimen is of a later date.

The period of the St. Louis cassone may be determined with a considerable degree of accuracy by comparison of the bas-relief with similar Italian sculpture of the sixteenth century. The reliefs on the doors of the cathedral at Pisa (erected 1596-1606), particularly the panel representing the Nativity, ascribed to Ansi Tedesco, resemble them most in point of general style and treatment. In the various panels on these doors, which are said to have been made under the supervision of Giovanni da Bologna and were long attributed to him, one finds the same handling of draperies, the same modelling of heads and hair after classic models and the same peculiar curling clouds which occur on the front of the cassone. Many of the works of Giovanni da Bologna (1530-1608), notably his

bas-reliefs, as for example, "The Entombment," and "Christ Sent Away by Pilate," in the University at Genoa, have plainly received inspiration from the same classic sources. The tomb of Charles Frederic, duc de Cleves (d. 1575), by Egidio di Rivieri, is also strikingly similar in style and displays the same peculiar cloud formation before mentioned. It is also interesting to note, in the bas-reliefs on the tomb of Gregory XI, by Pietro Paolo Olivieri (1551-1599), the same type of flat, pointed mountains which are depicted on the end panels of the cassone.

Our specimen would therefore appear to have been carved toward the end of the sixteenth century. It belongs to the period when enthusiasm for nature, restrained by respect for antique canons, imparted a livelier action to the figures and permitted fewer vertical lines in the composition than one finds in somewhat earlier works,—for instance, in the panels of Ghiberti's Gates of the Baptistry at Florence; but the attempt to obtain sublime effects by contorted poses and exaggerated muscular development, which marked the work of the imitators of Michael Angelo, is notably lacking. The large female figures at the corners and the smaller ones on each side of the escutcheon, have the

calm serenity of their classic models. Upon the Berlin cassone, the latter are replaced by despairing Titians, plainly inspired by The Slaves of Michael Angelo; and the corner figures are squat male forms entirely dissonant with the graceful reliefs about them. Then, too, the nearer approach of the Berlin piece to the exaggerations of the Baroque is proclaimed by the general tendency to over decorate—by the addition of swags and cherubs' heads to the moulding of the lid and by the disproportionate scale of the motifs on the base member.

The coat of arms which appears on the front panel has been blazoned as follows: *A fess or, having in chief a star (8) and in base a bull passant guardant, of the same; the latter on a mound.* It has not been possible to determine the ownership of the coat, but it is hoped that research work which is now in progress will shed some light upon this point.

Nothing is known of the past history of the chest except that it was for many years in the possession of the family of Lord Hardwicke, at Bra-braham Hall, Cambridge, England.

Another recent accession of the Museum is an Italian Renaissance cassone of Venetian workmanship. Although belonging to the sixteenth century, it retains the rectangular form of an earlier period, a style which continued in Lombardy and Venice long after the adaption of the sarcophagus form in Tuscany and Rome. The decoration on this chest is of the type generally ascribed to Jacopo Tatti, called Sansovino (1477-1570), who fled from the sack of Rome in 1527 to Venice, where for many years he was active as a sculptor and architect.

The Museum's cassone which is ascribed to his school is of walnut, carved in an evenly scaled design. In the center is a small blank escutcheon, intended for a coat of arms. Above and below are small grotesque heads flanked by two rows of volutes. On either side are large oval medallions, surrounded by scrolls. At either end are rectangular panels enclosing female heads. The base moulding is elaborately carved with acanthus leaves and stopped flutings. The ends are plain and are fitted with simple iron handles. Flat-topped chests of this type were often supplied with cushions and used as seats.

There is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, a chest, the design upon the body of which differs from our example only in certain very minor details; although the base moulding is quite different. The Metropolitan cassone also has feet formed of double scrolls, which are lacking in our example.

EARLY FRENCH RENAISSANCE DOOR

A CARVED walnut door of French workmanship, attributed to the reign of Francis I, which has been added to the collection of the Museum, is of particular interest as an illustration of the transitional period in French art when the native craftsmen, under the influence of skilled workers from Italy, were rapidly forsaking the Gothic style for that of the Renaissance. The door is divided into eight equal panels of grotesque, scroll and ribbon ornament, each having near its center a medallion with a head in high relief. The eight heads are practically modelled in the round and possess sufficient individuality to lend color to the opinion that they are probably por-

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traits of important personages. The door was hinged upon wooden pegs at the top and bottom, that at the top being re-enforced by a strip of iron terminating in a rude cross. The latch has been demolished, probably, as has been suggested, by some early band of marauders intent upon pillaging the chateau to which the door belonged. The lower portion of the door is considerably weatherbeaten, having been no doubt exposed to the elements more than the top, which was probably protected by a projecting ledge. The only restorations are portions of the moulding, particularly that bearing the latch, and the second panel from the left at the top.

It is interesting to note the similarity in treatment of the medallions with heads to those on the Gates of the Baptistry at Florence, by Lorenzo Ghiberti. The Florentine gates were set up in 1452, and were in all probability well known to the French craftsman who carved the Museum's specimen. A further comparison of the heads on the door shows a marked similarity to certain sculptures, medallals and other works of art produced in France from about the middle of the fifteenth century to 1520. The turban-like headdress, for instance, on the third panel at the bottom, is remarkably like that worn by one of the male figures in a group of "David and the Choristers of the Psalms" from a miniature in the Psalter of Rene II (about 1500). In the Holy Sepulchre by Ligier Richier, at Saint-Mihiel, Joseph and Nicodemus wear turbans, one of which has strips fastening underneath the chin, like that upon the door. Joseph of Arimathea, in the Holy Sepulchre of Chaource, Aube, dated 1515, wears a turban. The figures in the Holy Sepulchre of the Church of Saint John at Chaumont, Haute Marne, about 1460, are

clad in styles resembling those upon the door. The handling of the draperies is also similar. A medal of Aymar de Prie (1483) and a coin of Louis XII (1498), show striking similarities in the clothing about the neck to that in the first panels at the top and bottom, respectively.

Reference to the French works of art mentioned shows a decided resemblance, not alone in the minor detail of costume, but more particularly in the facial types and, most important of all, in the handling of the artists. Traces of the Gothic yet linger in the tendency to somewhat stilted poses and expressions, in the stiffness of drapery and naivete of handling; but the more graceful, more realistic style of the Renaissance, as introduced from Italy, is beginning to predominate. Inasmuch as all the pieces mentioned belong to the end of the fifteenth century or the first part of the sixteenth, there is considerable reason for supposing that the figures on the door were carved in the period between 1500 and 1550. At least, the artist who carved them worked under the influence of the style of that period, which coincides roughly with the reign of Francis I (1515-1547).

The scroll work in the panels surrounding the heads is clearly Renaissance, but possesses undoubted indications of having been made by a workman who had not entirely forgotten Gothic tradition. The grotesque figures in the third and fourth panels, particularly those at the bottom of the latter, have a distinctly Gothic flavor. One has only to examine the sculpture adorning any typical Gothic edifice to find their prototypes.

Specimens of woodcarving dating from about the time of the reign of Francis I, in which this blending of Gothic and Renaissance is apparent, are by no means rare.



CARVED DOOR

FRENCH RENAISSANCE

A SIXTEENTH CENTURY
FRENCH CREDENCE

A FRENCH credence or dresser of the sixteenth century, in carved oak, belongs to about the same period as the Renaissance door just discussed. The type of ornament which it bears

ports. The upper portion or body has two doors carved in elaborate candelabra motifs, fauns with ensigns and other decorations. Below the top section is a frieze decorated with birds and fruits and having in its center a circular medallion bearing the head of a helmeted warrior, a



FRENCH CREDENCE

XVI CENTURY

indicates that it is possibly a little later than the door, though antedating by several years the grotesque terminals and grinning satyrs of Du Cerceau and Sambin. Its period would thus seem to be about the middle of the sixteenth century.

The credence is constructed in the form of a rectangular buffet, with a hollow underbase and carved sup-

ports. The upper portion or body has two doors carved in elaborate candelabra motifs, fauns with ensigns and other decorations. Below the top section is a frieze decorated with birds and fruits and having in its center a circular medallion bearing the head of a helmeted warrior, a type of decoration which at once calls to mind the sculptured medallions upon the Renaissance door previously mentioned. At the back of the open base are four panels carved in linen fold design, a method of decoration which also occurs on the ends of the upper section. This simple but effective style of ornamentation is frequently met with on chests and other

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objects made near the end of the Gothic period, where it is often used in conjunction with motifs that are purely Gothic. The growing freedom of the French craftsman is charmingly evinced in the carved decorations of this piece, particularly in the narrower panels at front and sides. One sees in these panels an early manifestations of the inventive fancy of the woodcarvers of France which was to come to rich fruition in succeeding centuries. The piece was formerly in the collection of M. Chabrières-Arlès, Lyons.

A CABINET *À DEUX CORPS* IN THE STYLE OF DU CERCEAU

THE cabinet *à deux corps* illustrated on the cover of the BULLETIN is an example of the decorative style originated by Jacques Androuet (circa 1510-1580), called Du Cerceau, who flourished in France during the reign of Henry II and his successors, Francis II, Charles IX and Henry III, the last of the Valois kings. Under the influence of Du Cerceau and of his illustrious contemporary, Hugues Sambin, both of whom published albums containing engraved designs for monuments, furniture and sculpture, French decorative art developed its national characteristics, based, it is true, upon the Italian style introduced during the reign of Francis I and his immediate predecessors, but nevertheless different and entirely French in spirit. Du Cerceau was an architect of note, but his greatest service consisted in the publication of several books of engravings, including designs for mathematical instruments, buildings, escutcheons and furniture, the latter containing drawings for twenty - one cabinets, twenty - four

tables, a choir stall, two doors, eight beds, two brackets, one overmantel, one panel, three terminals and eight pedestals. These designs are characterized by an elaborate profusion of line and ornament. Their complicated nature made them unsuitable for literal reproduction; yet they proved a veritable mine of inspiration for French craftsmen, and the decorative ideas which they embodied were widely copied. These followers of Du Cerceau constituted what is known as the *Île de France*, or Parisian school, while those of Sambin formed the Burgundian school. Du Cerceau, with whom the Italian influence was the stronger, has followed classic canons to a considerable extent in the choice and arrangement of his designs. His panels are almost always bilaterally symmetrical, while Sambin's balance is apt to be less obvious. Du Cerceau strives always for grace and for richness of minute detail, this detail being usually in comparatively low relief. Sambin is more robust and outspoken, his carving, particularly the smaller details, in deep relief. Terminal figures are everywhere in evidence in the work of Du Cerceau. Such figures, bearing baskets of fruit on their heads, as capitals, are a favorite with him both in his designs for furniture and architecture. Sambin does not use the terminal to such an extent, although he employs both it and the caryatid. The ornament of Du Cerceau abounds in strap-work, in pointed leaf and fruit forms and grotesque satyrs, nymphs and gorgons.

The cabinet *à deux corps* in the Museum's collection exhibits many of these characteristics of the style of Du Cerceau. The upper section consists of three panels in low relief, forming doors, which alternate with four grotesque terminal figures bearing on their heads baskets of fruit.



ARM CHAIR HENRI II

Beneath the central door is a small drawer with a decoration of intertwining grape vine.

The lower section of the cabinet is somewhat wider and deeper. It is fitted with two drawers at the top, between brackets with acanthus leaf decoration. Below, on either side of a central terminal figure, are two large doors, on which is a repetition of the broken pediment motif. The sides are decorated in panels of strap-work, a favored style of the period. The piece was formerly in the collection of Mr. T. Foster Shattock, and was exhibited for many years on loan at the South Kensington Museum.

CHAIR, PERIOD OF HENRI II

THE sixteenth century French arm chair illustrated on this page was made during the reign of Henri II (1547-1559).

There is considerable divergence of opinion as to the exact derivation of

the monogram, which appears on the back of the chair beneath the royal crown of France. Some authorities maintain that it is a combination of the letters "H" and "C" of the names of Henri II and his wife, Catherine de' Medici; while others believe the cipher to be that of the king and his celebrated mistress, Diane de Poitiers. The resemblance in this particular case of the central letters of the monogram to the interlocked crescents which occur on certain objects known to have belonged to her, points strongly to the second theory. The same monogram, on a background with edges of scrolls similar to that upon the chair, is found upon the wainscoting in the Chateau of Anet which the king erected for Diane.

The wood used in the construction of the chair is walnut. The back is carved in low relief with a design closely akin to the familiar strap-work of the period. In the curved arms, terminating in ram's heads, may be seen the predecessors of the more elaborate arms found upon the chairs



SIDE CHAIR LOUIS XVI

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of the Louis XIV and later styles. The legs and underbraces are turned. The seat is severely plain and uncomfortable in appearance. Its hardness was in all probability mitigated by a cushion.

This chair and the other example illustrated, dating from the period of Louis XVI, were acquired by the Museum early in 1919.

The furniture described in this BULLETIN is at present installed in galleries 1 and 17, at the left and right, respectively, of the main entrance.

THE FALL EXHIBITION

THE Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of Paintings by American Artists opened on the evening of September 12th with a reception and preliminary view in the galleries, which was attended by several hundred visitors. The collection contained 166 paintings by 133 artists. The open, competitive policy was continued this year, the majority of the pictures being selected by two juries, one meeting in New York City and the other in St. Louis.

The exhibition was a varied one, both in subject matter and in technique. The artists found their inspiration in the diverse aspects of American landscape and in the manifold activities of the American people. But whether the painter depicted the sun scorched deserts of the West, the shady slopes of New England hills, the miner with his pick, or the society matron, he saw with the eyes of an American; and he presented, in all probability, some interesting and hitherto unseen phase of the landscape or social habits of our country. All this augurs well for a strong native art: Differences of style matter little so long as there is a



BETALO RUBINO, DRAMATIC DANCER
ROBERT HENRI

definite consciousness of the possibilities of American subjects and a determination to seek out and utilize those possibilities.

It is the policy of the Museum in holding the exhibition each year to stimulate in every way possible art interest and art productivity, both in St. Louis and the entire country, by giving every artist of merit an opportunity to publicly present his work.

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**THE CITY ART MUSEUM
OF ST. LOUIS**

FOREST PARK, SAINT LOUIS

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BULLETIN

The publication of the Bulletin is resumed with this number, after having been suspended since December, 1917, on account of war conditions. Beginning with this issue, it will be published quarterly.

HOURS OF OPENING

The Museum is open free daily from 10 to 5 o'clock, Christmas Day and New Year's Day excepted.

GUIDANCE

The services of a docent, or guide, for schools, or groups of visitors, may be secured without charge by application at the office.

PUBLICATIONS

Catalogue of Paintings, 190 pages
with 79 illustrations.....\$1.00
Catalogue of Sculpture (illustrated) 15c
Catalogue of Metal Work 15c
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COMMODE IN COLORED MARQUETRY

LOUIS XVI